

Trinity 13
God Reveals Himself to Us in Mercy
Luke 10:21-37
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“I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”

The wise and understanding of this world live by the Law. That isn't to say they understand its heavenly meaning. No, they make God's heavenly Law a very earthly thing. They turn God's Law which reflects the glory of heaven into the Law of the Jungle, where only the strong survive. God's Law commands you to do. And to the one who does as the Law commands, the Law promises life. So, in order to manage the Law and make it doable, the wise and understanding of this world add laws upon God's Law. The Pharisees were known to have come up with over 600 laws in addition to the Law God gave to Moses. These laws helped the Jews accomplish what otherwise seemed too difficult.

And this is always how mankind treats laws. When I was in college, a law professor gave a lecture to one of the political science classes to explain what law school would be like. One of the students came out of the lecture hall and said, “Well, I guess I'm not going to be a lawyer. I could never read that much.” And it's true. To be a lawyer, you have to read a tremendous amount of information; not just the written laws which increase year after year, but also the decisions courts have made concerning those laws. And because there is so much information about each law, the goal of many lawyers is not to seek the truth or serve justice, but to find a way for the law's many rules to justify their clients and condemn their opponents.

This explains the attitude of the lawyer, who seeks to test Jesus in our Gospel lesson. He is one of those wise and understanding types, who has turned obeying the Law into an art. “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”, he asks. Put aside for a moment that an inheritance is not something you must work to receive, but it is given according to promise. The lawyer asks Jesus a law question, so Jesus gives him a law answer.

“What is written in the Law?”

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind and your neighbor as yourself.”

“Correct,” Jesus answers, “Do this and you will live.”

Yet, the simplicity of Jesus’ command makes the Law impossible for the lawyer to fulfill. In order to justify himself, he must add to God’s Law, not to fulfill its heavenly goal, but to make it more attainable here on earth. “Who is my neighbor?”, the lawyer asks. You see, if the lawyer simply took the Law of God at its word, he would have to assume that he must love everyone. That is impossible for a mere man to accomplish. So, the Lawyer desires to add to the Law, not so that he can better love his neighbor, but so that he is not to blame when he doesn’t love his neighbor.

Jesus sees right through the lawyer. So, Jesus tells a parable, which crushes the lawyer’s hope in himself that he can fulfill the Law and which reveals to us God’s mercy, which the Law cannot give.

A man goes down from Jerusalem to Jericho and falls among robbers, who strip him, beat him, and leave him half dead. Down come two men: a priest and a Levite. Yet, both of these men walk by on the other side of the road. They do not help the man lying beat up and bloody. The priest and the Levite represent the Law. Their action teaches us both something about those who trust in their works of the Law and about the Law itself.

First, that the priest and the Levite walk by the bloodied man demonstrates to us that those who seek to justify themselves by their works of the Law are hypocrites. Jesus addresses this when he rebukes the scribes and the Pharisees saying, “Woe to you, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.” And in another place, Jesus rebukes those who try to falsely condemn his disciples, saying, “And if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless.”

The reason why those who seek to justify themselves by works of the Law are hypocrites, is because you cannot make your heart pure by your outward works. A bad tree cannot bear good fruit.

When sinners try by their works to make themselves righteous, they become like white washed tombs. They look good on the outside, but inside they are filled with dead people's bones and all uncleanness. By portraying the priest and the Levite passing by the bloodied man without helping him, Jesus exposed the odor of sin hiding in their hearts.

The Law can be divided into three parts: The Civil, which refers to laws made by the government; the moral, which refers to what is right and wrong; and the ceremonial, which refers to the regulations of worship. The moral law is summarized in the Ten Commandments. Those who seek to justify themselves according to the moral law do so by trying to put on some outward show of keeping the commandment. The priest and the Levite can justify themselves that they have not broken the Fifth Commandment, "You shall not murder." because they did not physically assault the poor man. Yet, they showed no love for the man's body, which is the goal of the Commandment. Likewise, the First Commandment says, "You shall have no other gods." and people think they keep this commandment by not worshiping idols of gold. Yet, in their hearts they worship other things by loving and trusting in people and money instead of God.

In the book, *War and Peace*, there is a wealthy countess who does not love her husband and desires to marry another man. So, she converts from Eastern Orthodox to Roman Catholic and justifies herself by saying that the marriage vows she made before her conversion were invalid. And in a myriad of other ways, people justify themselves by adding to God's Law, so that it is easier to outwardly perform it. All the while, their hearts remain black with sin.

The ceremonial law refers to the regulations God set in place for sacrifices in the temple. The priest and the Levite are coming down the road, which means they are leaving Jerusalem. They have just performed the ceremonies commanded by God in the temple. Yet, they prove that their performance was just an act. They did not worship God with their heart, otherwise, they would have helped the beaten man, for one cannot love God while he despises his brother.

Likewise, this shows us not to be hypocrites in our worship. It does not please God that you simply show up to church, mouth the liturgy, and ignore the teaching in the sermon. We must worship God in Spirit and truth. This means, we must worship God by receiving his grace through faith. Mere

outward actions are not what please God. And when Christians treat others with utter hatred instead of in humility counting others more significant than themselves, they betray the true condition of their heart.

You cannot be a Christian while you continue in unrepentant hatred.

Secondly, that the priest and the Levite walk by on the other side demonstrates to us something about the Law itself. The Law isn't going to help you when you are lying half dead on the side of the road. The Law does not feel compassion for you. The Law commands you to do. The Law doesn't care if your legs are broken; it will still tell you to run. The Law doesn't care if you are dead in your sin! It will still command you live without sin! As helpful as the priest and the Levite were to that beaten up man, so helpful is the Law in rescuing you from your sin and eternal damnation.

Then along comes the Good Samaritan. Samaritans and Jews were considered enemies. The Jews at that time were taught, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." (Matthew 5:43) According to the additional rule set up by the wise and understanding of this world, the Samaritan would have been justified in walking past his enemy lying bloody on the side of the road. Yet, the Samaritan had compassion. He loved his enemy and took care of him. He bound up his wounds, poured on wine to kill infection and oil to keep the wounds clean. He carried the man to an inn on his own animal and paid in full all his expenses.

Then Jesus turns the question around on the lawyer. He doesn't answer his question, "Who is my neighbor." He asks him rather, "Which one of the three was the neighbor to the one who fell among the robbers?" And when the lawyer answers, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus answers, "You go and do likewise."

You see, Jesus is the Good Samaritan, who shows mercy. He comes to your aid where the Law offers no help at all. The Law can only tell you to get up and improve yourself. Jesus picks you up and heals you. The Law can only blame you for the terrible situation your foolishness has placed you in. Jesus rescues you from your own folly and sin by forgiving you.

The wise and understanding of the world think that they are in control of the Law. And because of this they are blinded from God's love and mercy. They cannot see or know the Father. They can only

serve themselves. It is only through the revelation of Jesus that you can see God as your heavenly Father. And Jesus reveals himself to you in showing mercy. Jesus is the Good Samaritan, who suffers the loss for your sin, who helped you when you were his enemy, who does for you what the Law could never do, because of your sin.

“Go, and do likewise.”, Jesus says. As God has had mercy on you, have mercy on others. Forgive one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. Only those to whom the Father has been revealed through the mercy of his Son can go and do likewise. Only those, who have experienced God’s mercy through faith in Christ, can go and be merciful.

The story of the Good Samaritan is not an example of how you can earn eternal life by your own works, as if the wise and understanding of this world are just off on a few minor details. The story of the Good Samaritan is a story of God’s Grace. It teaches us that the Law is no help to us in our sinful condition. This parable is meant to clear us from the delusion that adding a few of our own rules to God’s Law will somehow make our sin pleasing in God’s sight. This story shows us a Savior, who loves his enemies. Yes, the Samaritan pours wine on the wounds, which stings, so Jesus rebukes our sin, which hurts. Yet, Jesus heals our sin with his own blood. He baptizes us, anointing us children of God. He carries us when we are too weak to walk. By his death and three day stay in the tomb, he gives God the Father a token of payment, so that we are never cast away. In his Church he continues to provide for us, forgiving our sins week after week, day after day. We are assured that his grace will never run out, but whatever expense our sin has incurred, he will pay.

The wise and understanding in this world add laws that chip away the requirement of the Law to love. Yet, we love, because God first loved us and gave his Son to die for us. Christ Jesus is the completion of the Law for righteousness to all who believe. As his love is poured out on us, so his love pours from us to our neighbor. This love is known only through the revelation of God’s mercy in Christ. Amen.